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Students get a friend, advice from mentors in faculty program

By John Jarvis
Reporter

If a Texas A&M student has a problem and doesn't quite know who to turn to for help, Dr. James McNeal of the marketing department may have the answer.

His solution? Talk to one of the ATMentors on campus, anytime — day or night.

McNeal formed the organization in 1980 with 25 other faculty and staff members. The members willingly devoted extra hours to students who needed to talk about anything from grade-point averages to legal problems, he says.

This year there are 336 ATMentors, comprising about 15 percent of A&M's faculty and staff.

McNeal says that although not every department in the University is represented, he says the goal of the organization is "to have an ATMentor in every building on campus."

The name for the organization comes from Mentor, the friend and counselor of Odysseus and Telemachus. Webster's dictionary defines mentor as a wise and faithful friend.

The faculty and staff who make up the program are "faithful counselors, friends, buddies — whatever," McNeal says.

Dr. Michael Trulson, associate professor of medicine, joined the organization two years ago. He says he became a mentor to help students who might feel lost and lonely at A&M.

The competitive atmosphere at A&M puts pressure on the students to excel, Trulson said, and the pressure to excel combined with the change of leaving home and coming to a large university can cause problems for students.

The adjustments to university life make incoming freshmen and transfer students feel lost and lonely, he says, adding that dorm life is very different from life at home.

Trulson says that he talks to about 15 students on a regular basis and deals with graduate and medical students as well as freshmen and transfer students.

Many of the problems center around loneliness, he says, but adds that he also hears a lot about dating problems and drug problems.

He adds that the organization is not a political or religious organization, but is made up of people who genuinely want to help students with any problems they may have.

McNeal says the ATMentors program is not an officially recognized part of the University and, as a result, the organization only receives $2,500 per year from the Student Affairs Department for printing reference manuals that every ATMentor has. McNeal calls this "thoughtful money" from the University.

McNeal says that it is probably better for the ATMentor organization that it is not officially recognized by the University because it gives the organization more flexibility.

Other money for the organization comes from A&M Mothers Clubs, he says. The organization recently received a $3,000 endowment from the Houston A&M Mothers Club.

McNeal said the reference manuals list the mentors' names and telephone numbers and the services they offer. The manuals aren't available to students because it would cost too much to print the directories for A&M students.

However, he says, an abbreviated list of about 40 ATMentors is on a "foldout" that is distributed to freshmen, transfer students and A&M Mothers Clubs.

McNeal says that mentors have a sign, or "shingle," that hangs on the door of their offices. The shingles are put up so students will have a visible reminder of which staff members are part of the program, he says.

McNeal says the mentors aren't trained counselors and do not want to be — their main goal is to be friends to students and help the students be a part of A&M.

Trulson says that the advice he gives to students to work out their problems depends on the situation of each student, but says he usually pushes for self-reliance.

"I try to get them to work it out themselves," he says.

Salutes

By Dawn Butz
Staff Writer

A&M doctoral student gets writing pri

A doctoral student in Texas A&M's College of Education is amo nine English teachers nationwide to receive writing awards from th National Council of Teachers of English.

Leslie Patterson, who is completing a doctoral program in readi and language arts here, won an honorable mention for her artic "Becoming a Teacher/Researcher: Another Avenue to Excellence published by the Council for Junior High and High School Engli Teachers in their English Journal.

Professor receives research award

Dr. William J. Harris

A Texas A&M Snead Distinguished Professor of Transportation Engineering has received the Distinguished Research Award from the Transportation Research Forum.

The award was presented to Dr. William J. Harris at the annual meeting of the TRF for his contributions to transportation.

Harris served as vice president for the Research and Testing Department in the Association of American Railroads before coming to A&M in 1985.

Under his direction, the department established a major research program that grew from less than $1 million per year to more than $40 million.

In 1976 Harris was named the "Railroad Man of the Year" by Modern Railroad and in 1978 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Award by the Transportation Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences.

In 1981 he was invited by the ministry of railroads in China to lead a delegation to that country to arrange for cooperative programs that are continuing.

Artist creates 'solar system' spread over central Texas

AUSTIN (AP) — In artist John Blum's solar system, the planet Jupiter floats not in outer space but in the frozen food section of an Austin supermarket. Pluto is in a San Antonio motel.

For the past month or so, Blum, 33, has been creating a scale model of the solar system by using the Capitol dome to represent the sun and an assortment of properly sized spheres distributed around central Texas to mark the planets.

"A lot of people have asked, 'Well, why couldn't you just do the calculations and write it up?' " said B who has a bachelor's degree and eight years of graduate stu physics. " 'Why bother?'

"But when you are standing Blanco County courthouse w beach ball that represents Nep and you know that the sun is the pitol dome in Austin, you be get a feeling for how immens solar system is."

Blum has been meticulous calculations, but he said it was to resist the urge to fudge a lit the sake of cosmological irony.

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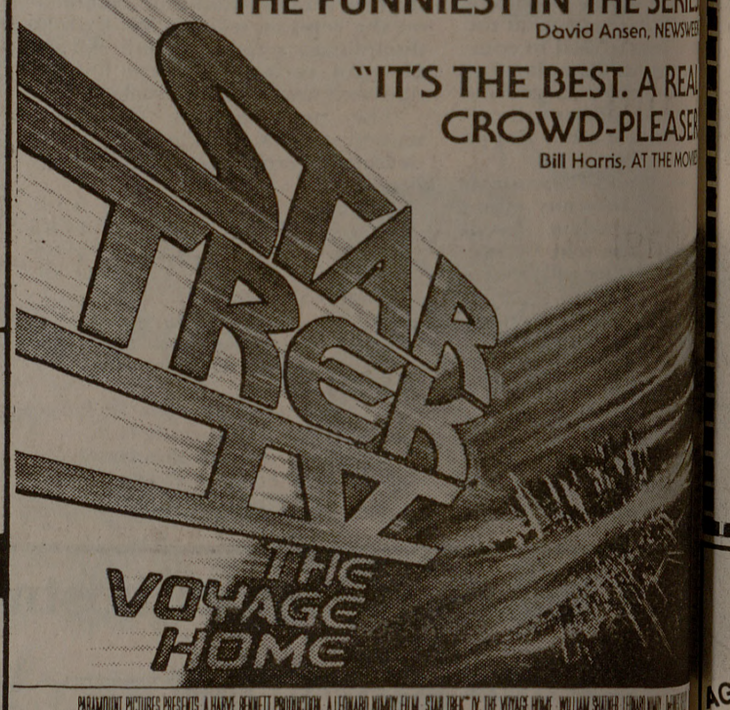
Bill Harris, AT THE MOVIES



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